



To: 2013 review  
Electricity Group  
Energy and Communications Branch  
Ministry of Economic Development  
PO Box 1473, WELLINGTON

Date: 28 September 2007

From: Medical Officers of Health  
Northland District Health Board Public Health Unit  
P.O. Box 742  
WHANGAREI

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Subject: Submission on the Review of Section 62 of the Electricity Act 1992 –  
'Continuance of Supply' (2013 review) - Discussion Paper.**

We wish make a submission regarding the above mentioned subject. As you know Medical Officers of Health provide specialist advice on matters that relate to population health and have an overall role to improve, promote and protect the health of Northlanders.

We wish to inform the Ministry that we support the option of '**Continuance of obligation to maintain line function services with no expiry date**' in all regions of New Zealand.

Electricity is a basic necessity in every-day lives of the people and affects their health. Northland is one of the most deprived regions in the country and according to 2001 census about 40% of our highly remote/rural population were Maori. Uncertainty of supply of electricity will have adverse public health effects on these people thus accentuating already existing health inequalities.

The discussion paper looks at only the economical impacts when loss of electricity can affect health and also quality of life. We believe that a Health Impact Assessment should be carried out before taking any decision to inform the decision makers of all the possible impacts.

The Northland Public Health Unit would also like to express its concern as we were not contacted to make a submission on this issue as it might have adverse public health impacts.

Please find enclosed a detailed submission attached. If you need any further information please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards  
Dr Loek Henneveld



## **SUBMISSION**

### **TO THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **ON THE REVIEW OF SECTION 62 OF THE ELECTRICITY ACT 1992 'CONTINUANCE OF SUPPLY' (2013 REVIEW)**

#### **Introduction**

The Northland Public Health Unit is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the discussion paper on the Review of Section 62 of the Electricity Act 1992 'Continuance of Supply' (2013 review).

This submission is from Medical Officers of Health, Northland District Health Board (DHB) Public Health Unit, P O Box 742, Whangarei. The Medical Officers of Health are public health physicians who provide specialist advice on matters that relate to population health and have an overall role to improve, promote and protect the health of Northlanders.

Northland DHB Public Health Unit, one of 12 in New Zealand, is the only provider of integrated, regional public health services in Northland and thereby has a unique role in promotion, protection and other public health activities, to improve health and well-being within our diverse Northland communities.

#### **Summary**

The Northland DHB Public Health Unit would like to support the option of '**Continuance of obligation to maintain line function services with no expiry date**' because:

- electricity is not an optional extra, but is very much a basic necessity of life (heating, medical devices, telephone and medical alert services, water treatment and supply equipment etc)
- about six percent of total Northland population live in highly remote/rural areas and among them about 40% are estimated to be Maori <sup>3</sup>. Thus discontinuation of electricity supply would accentuate health inequalities
- the remote/rural consumers need certainty of supply of electricity at an economical (affordable) price
- if the Line Companies assess that particular rural lines are uneconomical and decide to disconnect or stop maintenance, they have to ensure that an alternative is feasible.



### **Recommendations:**

- Before any decision is made regarding Section 62 of the Electricity Act 1992, a Health Impact Assessment should be performed to inform the decision makers of **all** the possible impacts.
- Social and economic factors have a fundamental impact on health and all central and local government policies should consider the impact of decisions/policies on health inequalities.

### **Our Submission**

The non-maintenance of electrical lines might impact significantly on the public health of the affected population, not only in respect of consumers with specific health issues, but for all families who rely on electricity for adequate heating, cooking and many of the basic requirements of everyday life. In present-day lives of all people electricity is not an optional extra, but very much a basic necessity of life.

### **Who will be most at risk if electricity supply is discontinued?**

The Northland is one of the most deprived areas in the country. About 49% of our population is in the lowest 3 deciles (8-10), compared with the New Zealand figure of 30%. About 78% of Maori live in the lowest 3 deciles (8 to 10)<sup>1,2</sup>.

About six percent of total Northland population lives in highly remote/rural areas as compared to national average of only two percent<sup>3</sup>. Proportions of Maori living in highly rural/remote areas were much higher in the North Island than in the South Island during 2001 census<sup>3</sup> and in Northland about 40% of the people living in highly remote/rural region were Maori. Maori bear a disproportionate burden of premature death and illness. Maori have poorer health even when socioeconomic position is considered. This means that it is important to ensure that new policies aim to reduce health inequalities between Maori and non-Maori not increase the disparity.

The hard-line policy of discontinuation of supply of electricity due to economical factors will hit many rural communities who are vulnerable because of low incomes and not just because of health conditions. They are the people who will continue to face unjustified levels of electricity supplies resulting in unacceptable levels of hardship in the Northland rural community.

**Other factors to consider:**

The Ministry needs to conduct a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) so that a sustainable developmental approach can be applied to this policy. Health Impact Assessment is a formal approach used to predict the potential health effects of a policy, with particular attention paid to impacts on health inequalities. As it is applied during the policy development process it facilitates better policy-making that is based on evidence, focused on outcomes and includes input from a range of sectors.

Social and economic factors have a fundamental impact on health. All central and local government policies should have reducing health inequalities as an objective and should consider how the policy would affect socio-economic conditions of the communities.

Northland is rich in a unique history that ties both Maori and non - Maori people together. Historical sites, buildings and artefacts can be found throughout the region. These factors should also be considered before making any further decision on this policy.

**Conclusion:**

Electricity has become a basic necessity in present-day lives of all people and not having an electricity supply affects their health. The Northland District Health Board Public Health Unit would like to support the option of 'Continuance of obligation to maintain line function services with no expiry date' under the review of Section 62 of the Electricity Act 1992. If this option is adopted then the remote/rural consumers would have certainty of supply of electricity at an economical (affordable) price. The Northland region has high percentage of Maori population living in highly deprived some rural regions and discontinuation of supply of electricity might further increase already existing health inequalities. We also feel that use of HIA regarding this policy will help to develop a better policy which is feasible to consumers as well as Lines companies.

**References:**

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<sup>1</sup> The Northland District Health Board, District Annual Plan 2005/06.

<sup>2</sup> The Northland District Health Board, District Strategic Plan 2005-2010.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics New Zealand website:  
<http://www.stats.govt.nz/urban-rural-profiles/highly-rural-remote-areas/people.htm>

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